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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-Iraq, Russia, Rumsfeld,
Financial-Crisis, Car- Industry, EU-Summit, Germany, Zimbabwe

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- ¶1. Lead Stories Summary

Editorials focused on the meeting in the Chancellery between Chancellor Merkel and leading business representatives on the state of the economy and on the debate over stolen bank data. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast Heute opened with a report on the meeting in the Chancellery and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with a story on the stabbing of Passau's chief of police.

- ¶2. (U.S.-Iraq) Bush in Baghdad

Die Welt wondered "how President Bush's image would look like if the Iraq war had not happened? He would probably have entered the history books as a leader who, after 9/11, succeeded not only in preventing more terrorist attacks on the United States but who also developed an anti-terror strategy that would remain valid for decades. But the Iraq war damaged the reputation of the U.S. president. However, Bush won't be put off. He is loyal to his principles and considers the U.S. mission in Iraq to be indispensable. That is why it is only consistent that he now bids farewell to his forces in Iraq."

- ¶3. Russia) New Opposition Party/Antigovernment Protests

S|ddeutsche commented: Russia's new liberal democrats have given themselves a great name, but they will not achieve the power of the Polish model party. They are as far away from being a mass movement as Moscow's glass palaces from the Siberian taiga. In an election... they would probably only get one-digit results although they do have a point. Russia is suffering under the worst economic crisis in ten years. The country needs a real democratic movement, more pluralism, and more competition in parliament. It was shocking that a serious problem like the bill to extend the tenure of the

president was pushed through without a debate. In Russia, the Kremlin is omnipotent - this is the key problem of the democrats."

Die Welt editorialized: "Once again, Russia's liberal democrats are making a new attempt to play a role in the political life of the country. They have founded a new party that they want to establish as an alternative to the ruling elite. That is very honorable because the Russian 'sovereign democracy,' which looks like the Communist model in Eastern Germany, needs a capable, independent and constructive opposition.... The new party will be artificially created as the political force of the middle class, which is, according to the new line of the Kremlin, supposed to rescue the country.... Solidarity, the new organization, will, however, not be able to change much. One reason is the autocratic setting in which the tandem of Putin and Medvedev operate. But the liberal democrats are also part of the problem, e.g., former Prime Minister Nemzov now pretends to stand for a new beginning although his reputation was damaged during the privatization in the 1990s. Thirty percent of the Russian voters would potentially cast their ballots for democratic alternatives, but only one percent actually votes this way. Most people no longer want to see the faces from the 1990s."

Berliner Zeitung remarked on the antigovernment protests on Sunday in Moscow: "Every suspected protester was watched by 80 police officers, 20 journalists, ten undercover police and secret service agents, five agents provocateur, five pro-government protesters, and a few passersby. If they hadn't taken some people out of the group of journalists, police officers, agents, provocateurs and passersby, one could have thought that there were no demonstrators. One day there will be demonstrations in Russia without protesters; demonstrations of the state power without any spontaneity."

14. (U.S.) Report on Rumsfeld Regarding Detainees

Berliner Zeitung commented: "Last summer, Jane Mayer published 'The Dark Side' - a kind of charge that contained many details proving that the leading U.S. politicians did not just approve of criminal practices but also initiated them... This was not enough yet to take Rumsfeld to court. This might not be that bad because if Rumsfeld is taken to court after the Bush era there might be a chance that he will not be pardoned by the President."

15. (U.S.) Financial Crisis

Frankfurter Allgemeine noted: "Hardly a day passes in which a higher sum is not mentioned that President-elect Barack Obama will approve after his inauguration to stimulate the U.S. economy. But the goal is clear: state supported demand is to help where private demand no longer exists. This sounds nice and can be sold as investments for the future. But the problem is that the money for such investments does not fall from the sky. Obama would be better advised to concentrate on lowering both income and corporate tax rates linked to the promise to put the state finances as quickly as possible in order again."

16. (U.S.) Car Industry

Regional daily Südwest Presse of Ulm judged: "It is time for the three U.S. carmakers to go bankrupt. Only then can the situation improve. Badly managed, highly indebted, without a plan, and in addition stubborn, the companies which have run up debts amounting to 40 billion dollars should not be surprised if the U.S. Senate considers another 15 billion for them to be wasted money. The only practicable solution is bankruptcy under Chapter 11. But this is only the first step. The second one refers to their bosses. Instead of financial experts, the companies need people at the top who consider cars more than only products with which to make money."

Märkische Allgemeine of Potsdam noted: "We must fear that the next disaster is already waiting at the horizon. With the looming bankruptcy of three U.S. carmakers, a global economic slump is looming whose extent is hardly foreseeable. President Bush's surprising move to rely on the savings package for U.S. banks shows how helplessly politicians are reacting to the crisis. Even if GM & Co. can be saved for a while, it is totally unclear what should happen thereafter."

Allgemeine Zeitung of Mainz opined: "If the bankruptcy of the U.S. car industry would not lead to unforeseeable consequences for the entire U.S. economy, we would unrestrictedly applaud the Republicans in the U.S. Senate for their 'no' [to the financial package for the U.S. car industry]. It is by no means the upcoming global economic crisis that has brought GM, Ford, and Chrysler to the brink of abyss. It is rather their business plan of selling outmoded models that demonstrates that they have not realized the turn of an era in the world. The future for this industrial sector is called environmental awareness and economy. But with their gas guzzlers, the Americans are miles away from it."

17. (EU) Reaction To EU Summit

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung judged: "An old European rule is still intact: Germans are considered good Europeans only if they pay. But despite the immense external pressure, it was more important for the chancellor to stick to her course of a controlled crisis management than to be everybody's darling or to remain Sarkozy's darling. The argument of spin doctors that Germany would isolate itself if it did not run up debt for the benefit of Europe could easily be parroted. But in Brussels, it was also easy to observe what kind of nonsense this is."

Sueddeutsche Zeitung argued: "The chancellor's credibility crumbled and the failure of the EU climate package seemed to be preprogrammed. But the opposite happened. Weighing politics between climate change and economic crisis, and supported by a very committed EU President Nicolas Sarkozy and a generous chancellor, the leaders adopted a climate package that did not follow the doctrines of environmental activists or the economic lobby. And this gives reason to hope. This European climate package is a quantum leap in the global learning process. Who would have bet eight years ago on such climate rules?"

In the view of Handelsblatt "the facade still stands. Despite considerable demolition work in the interior of the climate package, the EU continues to remain loyal to its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent in 2020. It can still consider itself a trailblazer in climate protection, for Barack Obama lags miles behind the EU with his announcement that it plans to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to the level of 1990. And from the rest of the world we can expect even less. Politics needs models to convince. And thus far, the Europeans have been the only ones who have shown the courage to do so. Despite the economic crisis, the EU leaders have withstood the temptation to round file climate protection."

According to Financial Times Deutschland, "the EU several times committed itself to supporting the analysis of the UN Climate Council. But instead of investing money in the restructuring of buildings in the EU and making transportation more environmental friendly, the Europeans are now supposed to invest more in cheap climate projects initiated by the developing countries. In order to avoid jeopardizing the overall package, the European Parliament must approve it. But the parliamentarians must make clear that they want to correct this mistake if the EU reviews its climate laws after the Copenhagen conference in 2009. Otherwise, the EU will not be considered a credible trailblazer with respect to climate protection."

Westfälische Nachrichten of Münster argued: "With this climate and economic package, the EU has proven that, despite the economic crisis, it is capable of acting. But the EU failed with respect to its new own structure, i.e. the Lisbon Treaty. It is simply a disaster that Ireland - and thus all other EU countries - will get their own individual commissioner in Brussels. Thanks to the new basic rules, Europe was supposed to become faster, more democratic, and less bureaucratic. How should this work with 27 commissioners?"

18. (Germany) Reaction To Financial Crisis

Stuttgarter Zeitung had this to say: "Merkel's situation reminds us of the one of legendary Odysseus who had to choose between Scylla and Charybdis. If she wastes billions of taxpayers' euros for useless activities, she won't have the funds for an effective economic policy. But if she hesitates for too long, she will risk entering the history books as a chancellor who even worsened this

unprecedented crisis. The current Nobel Prize winner in economics is loudly thinking about the question of whether Merkel misinterprets the seriousness of the situation and whether she lacks the intellectual flexibility that is now necessary. Criticism could hardly be more devastating."

Express of Cologne argued: "With every new day of the financial crisis, helplessness is rising. Recipes such as bailout packages for banks and companies costing billions of euros to a lowering of taxes or consumer vouchers are in the tool box. But does the ordinary citizen understand this confusing debate? In addition, he or she cannot buy anything with promises. They are nothing but packages with a false label that the governing parties want to use until the Bundestag elections. Currently, the Merkel Cabinet seems to lack a concept. We must fear that the Chancellor will anesthetize the country with her policy of a quiet hand and of sitting out problems--making it impossible for the country...to vigorously master the crisis."

According to L|becker Nachrichten, "the picture that German politics is currently offering is not very appropriate to create confidence. It rather looks like a chicken coop. The reason is probably less the Chancellor's defensive crisis management but rather her apparent lack of authority that is characterizing Angela Merkel's leadership style. The confidence in the Chancellor's ability to master this crisis is waning, and the main reason for this is the nebulous positions of her Cabinet and the governing parties."

19. (Zimbabwe) Mugabe On Cholera

According to Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, "Mugabe's rhetoric about cholera as the continuation of British colonialism with biological agents is as miserable as the government's pledges that Mugabe only sarcastically declared the end of the epidemic. The draft for a constitutional amendment that the government has now presented is only a tiny step down the path to political hygiene because Mugabe continues to block a real division of power that would also end the rule of police and the military. And Mugabe will hardly be able to survive without the military, but not because he is afraid of an invasion but because his people know who is responsible for the cholera epidemic despite all the propaganda."

Koenig